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## Dance to a Degree: Communication in Training for a Concert Versus Commercial Dance Career

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Dance to a Degree:

Communication in Training for a Concert Versus Commercial Dance Career

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### **Abstract**

There is often a divide between the professional concert dance and commercial dance world. There has been much debate on what differentiates these two ends of the professional dance spectrum. At the collegiate level, a dance student is preparing to enter the dance world as a whole. This study aimed to determine the different communication given to students in collegiate level dance classes and environments, that prepare dancers for either the concert or the commercial world. As well as determine what aspects makes a class geared for concert or commercial dance. Observing classes geared toward a career in concert versus commercial dance, the study was able to observe how a specific collegiate level program in Southern California prepares their students for the professional world.

## **Dance to a Degree:**

### **Communication in Training for a Concert Versus Commercial Dance Career**

The dance world is a large and complex community filled with different genres, cultures, and norms. A current topic of conversation at dance conferences around the United States is the gap between the commercial and concert worlds. (Burt 2018). There has been much debate on what differentiates these two ends of the professional dance spectrum. Dancers in various professional training programs, such as the collegiate level, are often asked to identify as either a commercial or concert performer in order to train for the type of work they are wanting to book in their career. However there is also a discussion being had about dancers pursuing careers in both fields at the professional level. Bridging the gap between the two dance worlds is being done by respected dance professionals, but is not commonly seen across the average working dancer. College dance programs will train dancers in both the concert and commercial dance fields during their undergraduate classes.

This research is aiming to study the different communication between the professor and students in collegiate level dance classes that prepare dancers for either the concert or the commercial world. I am curious to see if the language used during class and in the overall department have different intentions due to the different requirements needed to be successful in either career path. There has been some study on the communication strategies used in both collegiate and professional level organizations, but only a couple surrounding the culture of dance. There has been a large amount of research done however about the language used between teachers and students and how it can affect the outcome of a student's learning outcomes. This research on studying the difference in communication between dance classes

catered towards either concert or commercial professional dance is important because it can help further understand why there is a gap between these two fields in the dance world.

### **Review of Literature**

The theoretical groundwork for this study will be Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory methodology is one of the most commonly used methods of qualitative research when “generating theory” is the primary aim of the researcher. (Corbin & Strauss, 1997). This methodology allows the researcher to construct theories through the gathering and analyzing of qualitative data. Grounded Theory is especially helpful in uncovering and generating more information in less researched areas due to the set methodology. Another communication theory that will be used throughout this study is the relationship of verbal and nonverbal communication. In a typical exchange of face-face interaction both “vocal and visible behaviors” are shown. (Jones, 2002, 499). This is especially present in dance where individuals both talk and use their bodies to communicate a message to others. Therefore the coexistence and understanding of verbal and nonverbal communication will be crucial.

There is little research concerning the different aspects of the concert field versus the commercial field in the dance world. In fact, there are only two studies that directly compare the two as mediums and both were Dance Master’s theses written at The College of Brockport in New York. In one of the studies completed in 2013, Kaplan (2013), argues that commercial and concert dance lie on the same overall dance “spectrum,” based on performance norms of each field. While they are different forms of dance, they still lie on the same “horizontal” spectrum, which is dance. (Kaplan, 2013, 11). This understanding is important to learn as a growing dancer, choreographer, and professional in the dance world.

## **Concert Dance**

Concerning Kaplan's (2013) realization of the spectrum that concert and commercial dance forms exist, the qualities that categorize each end must be defined. While Kaplan stresses the use of a "horizontal spectrum" when it comes to comparing the two forms, Williams (2017), addresses that it has been commonly misunderstood that the two exist on a "vertical hierarchy" and spectrum instead. Williams explains that concert dance has been seen as a "high art while commercial dance has been regarded as a lower art." Different elements that defined concert dance, such as the performance tone, the process of creation, the final product, and the audience's responsibility, were seen to be more respectable than commercial dance. "Concert dance is considerably more exploratory within the development and presentation of the movement." (Williams, 2017, 6). The process in creating concert dance is often just as important to the choreographers and dancers involved in the piece. The goal for each individuals should be to immerse themselves in the movement, as well as the cognitive understanding and meaning behind those movements. This then translates over to the audience participation when watching concert dance being performed. Williams (2017) addresses that "performances featuring concert dance are platforms where questions are being asked and investigated by both the dancers and the witnesses." Concert dance between the audience and the performers have a dialogic tone, that craves both sides to participate in understanding the meaning behind the performance.

In an article written by Millennium Dance Center, Bronson (2015) explains that a stereotypical track for a dancer pursuing a career in concert dance would be to enroll in a college or university to gain a degree in dance. Kaplan (2013) connects to their own personal dance training in a collegiate setting, explaining that they were truly exposed to concert dance creation

for the first time in college. An excerpt from Kaplan's experience states, "Suddenly I was a student of dance theory, propelled into this world of abstract, gestural movement that was making people ponder the human experience; ironically, this particular version of performance was also called dance." (Kaplan, 2015, 2). Kaplan talks about realizing a new way to think about and understand dance. These findings and explanation suggest that most dancers are exposed to instruction in relation to concert dance performances at the collegiate level. There is no research that talk about dance students training in concert dance at the high school or lower levels. Relating back to Williams' (2017) reference of the "vertical hierarchy" between the two forms, a reason behind that misconception could be that qualities geared in concert dance are taught at only higher level in a dancer's training.

### **Commercial Dance**

Williams' (2017) discusses that commercial dance "in a pure form, values product over process." Meaning that the final presentation and performance is superior to the length or number of rehearsals in which the piece is made. Due to the prioritization on the product and not the process, the meaning and understanding behind the piece is less enforced compared to concert dance pieces. This lack of comprehending meaning on the dancer's end then correlates to the audience relationship in a commercial dance performance. At a higher degree than concert dance, the audience is vital in the presentation of commercial dance. Commercial dance is often seen as pure entertainment and is concerned with the "viewer's satisfaction and pleasure during the performance." (Williams, 2017, 7). In regards to commercial dance training, Bronson (2015), explains that many dancers are exposed to this throughout their high school and early years of training. Emphasis on the skill set developed while training to then aid dancers in booking and

getting jobs for commercial dance performances. Besides continuing technique training at the collegiate level there is no research on further teaching that aids a career commercial dance.

### **Dance Instruction and Collegiate Level Training**

Dance education, in general, has a very specific language and terminology that comes along with it. The *Journal of Physical Education: Recreation and Dance* in 2001, suggests that dance is both a verbal and nonverbal language. The instruction of dance can be recognized by the students both verbally and non-verbally due to specific dance movements and the term associated with them. The verbal language “is used when one is teaching, learning or creating dance,” whereas dance’s non verbal language lies in the “purposeful, intentionally rhythmical, and culturally influenced sequences of body movements that are selected in much the same way that a person would choose sequences of verbal language.” (Hanna, 2001, 42). The movements done throughout the body can convey information just as clearly as if it were verbal. The physical and gestural movements meanings in dance can be understood through elements such as rhythm, effort, dynamics, shape, space, and more. Hanna (2001), compares the language of dance to American Sign Language due to both drawing upon the same “components of the brain for conceptualization, creativity and memory as verbal language.” This correlates to dance instruction, when an instructor demonstrates physically a movement or quality to the student without speaking verbally. The teaching techniques of dance’s verbal and nonverbal language is important to understand when observing dance environments because the instructor will use combinations of both to communicate to the students.

How a professor instructs their students can impact the learning outcomes the students receive from the class and therefore prepare them for a professional career. There has been



research that uncovers different forms of communication in a collegiate level dance company and classrooms in several universities. The teaching style is not the only impact that instructors can have on a student's future career, it also connects with the instructor's goals and outcomes of set classes and programs. Levy (2010) states that the Director of a large, urban, college's dance department believed that a membership in a company during a student's collegiate training would be more valuable experience than participation in classrooms for the student's future career in the dance world. Being exposed to a variety of communication and teaching style in both classroom and rehearsal settings would prepare the students to the different methods instruction at a professional level. Klockare, Gustafsson and Nordin-Bates (2011) found several collegiate level dance professors, who instructed a variety of styles, and discussed the desired outcomes for students in dance programs. All came to the mutual agreement that instilling both dance techniques and psychological skills in the student would allow a successful career in the dance world post school. These findings prove that professors create multiple ways to help students succeed in collegiate programs and to prepare them for the professional world of dance. It is important to note the professors that gave this information taught styles from modern to hip hop. The variety is vital because instruction and how a student perceives it can vary through each style

Oliver, W. (2011) found that most institutions had cross-disciplinary goals in place such as "writing across the curriculum, critical thinking, wellness, quality of life, applied research, technology literacy, and civic engagement." The skills and aspects that collegiate level dance students learn tied in non dance related goals in order to have their students succeed in multiple fields of life. An interest on not only the student's ability to succeed in the professional dance

world, but to succeed in the overall professional world as well. Collegiate level dance programs want more than to simply continue dance training, they want to enable students to have an understanding of dance world's history and theory in order to set them apart from dancers who did not receive a dance degree. (Oliver, 2011, 8). Instructors understand that in the collegiate level programs, they must instill more than advanced technique but also a deeper understanding of dance as a whole.

### **Student's Perception on Collegiate to Professional Training**

Connecting to the the student's viewpoint of professional development in the collegiate level, it would be intriguing to see what the student's opinion on pursuing a concert versus commercial career would be. Would one dancer find the concert or commercial field a higher caliber compared to the other? Are there certain qualities a dancer sees in themselves that makes them more inclined to pursue a career in the concert or commercial field? In looking at perceptions of students in a dance training industry, researchers found that there were specific themes that a dancer looked for in themselves that proved they could realistically have a professional career in dance. Dancers from first to third year undergraduate students, graduated students, and students that dropped collegiate level training programs were interviewed. Themes that were discussed were the dancer's own skill development, quality of teachers and training in their programs, and networking opportunities they had been exposed to. (Stanway, Bordia, Fein, 2013). The openness of communication for the dancers to expose their opinions is an important relationship for students and instructors to have, especially at the collegiate level. Levy (2010) discussed the discourse within the students and professors because they felt that choreography was being set at a lower level because of certain students, and they would not be able to

demonstrate their own level of skill on stage. Collegiate programs want to be sure they are giving the best material and instruction to their students in order for them to excel past graduation.

### **Methods**

*Research Question 1:* Will there be a difference of instruction in classes geared toward styles that traditionally perform in the concert dance setting versus the commercial dance setting?

*Research Question 2:* How will professional level influences be talked about in each of the classrooms, that connect to the dancer's future career past graduation?

### **Procedures**

A qualitative communication research approach was used during this study in order to effectively uncover answers to the research questions above. Qualitative research is committed to study "the performances and practices of human communication." (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, 4). Qualitative research consists of multiple methods of obtaining data; including field observations, conducting interviews, and analyzing documents. This allows a flexibility that was important to this study in particular because different populations and methods were needed to obtain information. The location chosen to conduct observations for this study is the Loyola Marymount University Dance Department. In order to answer the research questions above I needed to observe dance class for students training at a collegiate level program. I am currently a dance major within the Loyola Marymount Dance Department, which is why I chose to conduct observations and research there. Due to my involvement in the organization I was familiar with the professors, faculty, and students, which therefore created a level of trust while carrying out research.

I chose three different classes within the department intended for students planning to pursue a career in either the concert or commercial dance world to obtain observations from. Two classes were modern technique, geared for third and fourth year dancers in the program. The other class observed was a jazz technique class geared specifically for seniors and their potential future career in the commercial world. This jazz class is the only one offered in the department with a specific commercial dance focus. I chose to observe a combination of modern and jazz dance classes because modern tends to be performed most often on the concert end of the dance spectrum, whereas jazz tends to be performed most often on the commercial end. The majority of my observations were made through either an observer participant or complete participant lense. Being a dance major within this department I was currently enrolled in the jazz class I gained observations from for this study, therefore I was a complete participant. The teacher was aware I was gaining observations from class but I would “engage fully with the participants and partake in the activities” throughout class. (Sauro, 2015). In the modern technique classes I observed but was not enrolled in, I took on the role as a observer participant. I would sit at the front of the classroom and take field notes, without partaking in the actual class. I had some interaction with the participants since they knew I was sitting in on class to take notes, but the interaction was limited. All field notes were handwritten and then coded into categories after. I focused on the traditional and nontraditional dance terminology, verbal and nonverbal language in teacher instruction, concert and commercial dance references, and the mention for overall student outcomes in the department. While watching the modern technique classes a combined total of ten hours worth of field note observations were made. In the jazz class I was enrolled in I took approximately thirteen hours worth of field note observations after class.

The other method of research was through an in-depth interview with the chair of the dance program, as well as shorter interviews with individual professors. All interviews were recorded in order to transcribe and sort them into the coding categories afterwards. The in-depth interview with Damon Rago, the chair of Loyola Marymount University Dance Department, lasted just under an hour. Topics of discussion consisted of his own personal dance background and how it correlated to his instruction during classes, his definition of commercial and concert dance, the outcomes for students in the dance department, and different professional relationships on the concert and commercial dance spectrum in the department. The shorter interviews conducted were all under ten minutes in length and discussed the interviewees dance background and how it affected their instruction in a dance classroom. Interviewing professors outside of their classes allowed me to gain a deeper perspective on their goals for their students while in class. The combination of the analyzed field notes and information from interviews all allowed me to gain the material necessary to answer the research questions for this study.

### **Participants**

The two categories of populations I observed and gained information from were the students and the professors involved in Loyola Marymount University Dance Department. The student population consisted of female dance majors and minors, ages nineteen to twenty-three, currently enrolled in classes tailored for third and fourth year students. A majority of this student population had been in the dance program since their first or freshman year at the university. While some students transferred in from other colleges' dance departments during their second or third year. The professor population will consist of four individuals, who all have professional experience working in either the concert or commercial dance fields. This included the Chair of

Loyola Marymount University Dance Department, Damon Rago. The professors from the technique classes I observed included, the department's "Director of Jazz" who taught "Jazz 6-Senior Edition," a full time faculty member who taught "Modern 5," geared for seniors, and a part time faculty member who taught "Modern 4," geared for juniors. This student and professor population allowed an appropriate variation on the different types of instruction the students experience in this particular collegiate level dance program.

### **Results and Interpretation**

After conducting observations and the interview there were three themes that surfaced regarding the instruction of dance geared toward styles that traditionally perform in the concert dance setting versus the commercial dance setting. These themes have been classified as Concert Dance Influence, Commercial Dance Influence, and Commonalities Between Fields.

#### **Concert Dance Influence**

There is no official definition of concert and commercial dance, therefore finding out what Loyola Marymount University dance department qualifies concert dance as was crucial to the research process. When interviewing the chair of Loyola Marymount University Dance Department, Damon Rago, he personally defined concert dance as "a form of making dance, where dance is the primary art...it's what you're there to see and all the other sort of art forms that you're witnessing: costuming, lighting, sound, are all in support of dance." (D. Rago, personal communication, 2018). Although Rago's definition is his own and does not reflect a set definition the department as a whole holds, it connects with the essential qualities used to classify concert dance when doing initial research. Referring back to Williams (2017) explanation of the connection between the audience and the performers both being asked to

question the meaning behind the performance. The audience's full attention is focused on the dancing happening before the. The role of dance is more complex because it is the main element of the performance and the audience is getting to watch and wonder about the image and movement they are experiencing.

### *Improvisation and Imagery*

When observing, the two classes that seemed they had the most influence from concert dance were the modern technique classes. When discussing the desired outcomes of students graduating from the Loyola Marymount dance program with Rago, he emphasized that they are dedicated to creating a diverse dancer by training them in a variety of styles. This variety includes training in both modern and jazz techniques. A main element he discussed is the concept of improvisation in dance and how a college educated dancer will stand out in regards to their improvising skills in an audition.

“When someone says the next section is going to be an improvisation, you're going to see the difference. You're going to see the college dancers really set themselves apart when it comes to improvisation, and critical thinking, and creative thinking...These people [college dancers] train commercially and these other ways. So it's like "woah they're so much more complex and daring and creative!" Because they've done more than just one kind of training.” (D. Rago, personal communication, 2018).

Based observations within the class, these improving skills that college educated dancers receive are constantly in their modern technique classes. The mention Rago made about training both “commercially and these other ways” were in regards to the concert influenced training taking place in modern classes. Each modern class had an entirely different instruction, format, and

quality of movement presented, however, they both shared the theme of using improvisation or imagery to inspire movement in dancers. Kaplan (2015), refers to the exposure of concert dance training as being “propelled into a world of abstract and gestural movement that made people ponder the human experience.” (Kaplan, 2015, 2). In the junior level “Modern 4” class instructed by James Gregg, about half of the class is based on improvised movements. Improvisation was used for the students to stretch and warm up or to create material and phrases. (observation, November 2018). He constantly challenged his students to come up with improvised movement on their own rather than showing them a combination and having them follow along move-by-move. The improvised sections of class would vary from being individual to contact with other students in the class.

Once when observing, Gregg’s modern class the first thirty minutes of were solely the students improvising to warm up their bodies, while Gregg instructed them by either calling out imagery phrases to inspire movement or moving himself to show what movement quality they should try to emulate. Examples of phrases being used were: “moving the space”, “soil”, “butterfly effect”, “vacuum”, or “riding the wave.” (observation, November 2018). Each of these phrases had been previously discussed and explained in class so when called out to the students they would know how to physically respond to them. Without the dance context and explanation each of these words and phrases would not have the same meaning to every individual. This shows how the use of imagery makes the student think and connect a physical quality in association to the word. The use of imagery trains the student to also focus on their individual self, space, and movement quality, while often times relating to the space of their classmates around them as well. In senior level “Modern 5”, the instructor, Roz LeBlanc Loo



never had any specific instances of improvisation during the classes. However she often used imagery words and phrases as well to help students with their quality of movements. Her class was more choreographed in the sense that they had been doing variations of the same warm up at the start of class since the beginning of the semester. It would always start with phrases that would warm up the feet, core, and then move to continue stretching and warming up the body in different areas. Imagery phrases like “generating some heat” or “sensation” were used to stress certain aspects of a warm up for the students to focus on. Again this training of imagery word and phrase association connecting to a student changing something they are physically doing, correlates to a knowledge of creative and critical thinking that set them apart from other dancers once they graduate the department.

#### *Concert Dance Professional Connections*

Another aspect of how concert dance influenced the Loyola Marymount dance department was the professional relationships had with individuals and companies that worked and performed in the concert dance world. There are many present connections that the department has with concert dance professional companies and individuals. Especially in their fulltime and part time faculty more than half of the individuals have heavy concert dance background . In the interview with Damon Rago, he discussed how all of his modern instructors brings a new technique and professional connection to the students. Rago wants to have a broad spectrum of modern taught to the students of the department and brings in professors that do just that.

“You’ve got Roz [LeBlanc Loo], with her sort of Bill T. Jones, white oak lineage, you’ve got Kate [Hutter Mason] doing release work, you’ve got Lillian [Barbeito] doing

“Countertechnique” and you’ve got James [Gregg] doing “RUBBERBANDance” Technique.” (D.Rago, personal communication, 2018).

The two instructors observed in the modern classe, James Gregg and Rosalynde LeBlanc Loo, both had extensively worked in the concert dance field. For example, Gregg had been a principal dancer with “Les Ballets Jazz de Montreal” for twelve years, which is a unique repertory company focused in contemporary ballet, coached “BODYTRAFFIC,” and studied “RUBBERBANDance”, a new style of modern founded by Victor Quijada that is inspired by combining breakdancing, classical ballet, and dance theatre. (J.Gregg, personal communication, 2018). Roz Le BlancLoo is a well respected, full time professor that teaches both freshman and senior modern classes in order for students can come full circle in the dance program in modern training. She has danced for Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company and White Oak Dance Project during the mid 1990s into the 2000s. The Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company is recognized as “one of the most innovative and powerful forces in the dance-theater world.” (New York Live Arts, 2018). In March 2015, Loyola Marymount University began an educational partnership with the company that would allow LMU to license and perform their works, company members coming and teaching students, and offering scholarships for students to go to the company’s intensive in New York City during summers. This partnership would of been less likely if LeBlanc Loo had not been an instructor at Loyola Marymount. The same for the department’s other relationships with concert based professional companies. Lillian Barbeito is co-founder of BODYTRAFFIC, a Los Angeles established contemporary dance company and Kate Hutter Mason is co-founder of LA Contemporary Dance Company. These companies also often offer

scholarship for workshops and intensives exclusively for Loyola Marymount students due to the fact that these professors work for both organizations.

These relationship between professors and their connections to professional companies is a huge networking opportunity for students both inside and outside of the classroom for the concert dance world. Stanway, Bordia, Fein (2013), discussed heavily that students in collegiate level dance training programs, perceived the success of the specific department's in connection with the networking opportunities they had been exposed. Many concert dance companies do not hold traditional auditions that commercial jobs and gigs do. As explained by Damon Rago, it is pretty common practice that companies will hire new dancers in a more organic fashion. If individuals go to open company classes and they express mutual interest or prove to be a familiar face, a dancer is likely to be hired to work for the company in that way. Recently, the dance department had a recently graduated student be hired to work for BODYTRAFFIC, a company co-founded by professor Lillian Barbeito. Rago explained that said student did not audition for the company but was picked up by Barbeito when putting a work on BODYTRAFFIC, that she had put on LMU student's the year before for the Fall Faculty Concert. When Rago asked Barbeito about why they didn't audition the student he explained her answer, he said:

"I would come to every rehearsal and [particular student] was prepared, she had a great attitude, she was super positive and super supportive. And in my ballet class and my modern class I saw the same thing. So I didn't need to audition her. Basically she was auditioning by being in class and being in rehearsal." (D.Rago, personal communication, 2018.)

This student was hired for a professional job due to the connection the Loyola Marymount dance department had with outside companies. By being a dedicated and passionate dance student while in the department, she was able to be offered a job, new experiences, and broadened her network in the dance world. They would have never received this opportunity if it hadn't been for the relationship that department had with the professor and the professor's company. It shows a great example about how connected and passionate the department is with connecting students to professional relationships that can lead them into a career once they graduate.

### **Commercial Dance Influence**

A majority of the information found about the influence of commercial dance in Loyola Marymount dance department was in the interview with Damon Rago. Mainly due to the fact that there is one class in the department that is committed to commercial dance work in the dance industry, which is the senior level "Jazz 6" class. While initially researching about commercial dance at the collegiate level there was not data found that suggested training towards a commercial dance career other than continuation on general technique. When asked to define commercial dance Rago replied with, "commercial work is in my estimation often dance in support of some other art form. So if you're a back-up dancer for a big superstar, you're there to support that person and that person's music." (D. Rago, personal communication, 2018). Essentially the opposite to Rago's definition about concert dance where he defined that dance was the main art form, commercial dance is in support of something or someone else. In accordance with initial research commercial dance can be defined as pure entertainment and is concerned with the "viewer's satisfaction and pleasure during the performance." (Williams, 2017, 7). Dancing simply adds to the experience of a concert or to the storyline of a movie or

television show, but it is purely in support of something larger. Rago's personal dance background is mainly in the concert world so he further explained that he works hard to "not talk about concert dance as something 'more than' commercial work" Similar to what was found in research, there is a stigma that concert dance is put on a more 'respected' pedestal above commercial work. (Kaplan, 2015). Rago works with his "Director of Jazz" for the dance department to help him find current and professional connections and new ideas for teachers, workshops, and choreographers in order for the students to be exposed to the commercial world while training at LMU.

### *Training for a Commercial Career*

This "Director of Jazz" is the instructor for the senior level "Jazz 6" class that was observed during this study. This jazz class was categorized in the syllabus as a class with having "a pre-professional emphasis and career planning" aspects. The observations for this class were made as a complete participant, meaning everything was experienced first hand during class activities. Out of the classes observed this was the only one with verbal mention of the student's future career as a dancer in the professional world. There were multiple guest artist and choreographers that came into teach the class in different jazz styles such as hip hop, musical theater, jazz funk, and contemporary. The students would wear a uniform shirt and number, so the class would feel like an audition setting. At the end of end guest artist they would then relay to the teacher who their "final choices" would be if it was an actual audition, and that information would later be announced to the class. (observation, October 2018). When a guest choreographer was not in class, the students would practice their warm up and progressions across the floor and would be filmed by the instructor in order for students to watch back and

learn from their mistakes. This warm up and progressions is completely choreographed and the students must learn and remember it from the start to the end of the semester. The counts and specifics of each exercise are written out on handout and given to the class. Videos explaining the purpose of the exercise and how to correctly do each one are uploaded to the online classroom. (observation, September 2018). The instructor would often teach combinations to the students in the span of ten minutes for the students to pick up and then perform individually in front of the class. All of these elements in class relate heavily with what a dancer experiences when trying to work and audition in the commercial dance world. Rago explains this specific class layout in detail during the interview,

“He [the Jazz 6 instructor] know what these people [commercial world professionals] are expecting of dancers and he’s trying to teach you that. So he models his class in that way... he expect you to learn at a pace that’s super professional.” (D. Rago, personal communication, 2018).

This class was a true pathway and eye opening experience for students to what elements of commercial work would be like, while also stressing the importance of technique and professionalism. While there are no other classes like these one in the dance department's curriculum there are other jazz classes.

Rago stressed in the interview that while Jazz is commonly associated with commercial dance, there is more to Jazz Dance as a style and history than what’s “happening behind Beyonce right now.” In a collegiate level program instruction in jazz dance does not correlate to instruction in dance for commercial dance. In every college level dance class students are approach material differently than how they would in high school where it was purely about

technique and practice. Specifically in LMU's dance program at the junior level the curriculum for jazz classes was that of the historical perspectives in jazz.

"Student's are upperclassmen now, they're ready for a class that maybe isn't so much about the glitzy-jazzy-dancey-dance. It's more about, let's look at where this came from and let's, I mean Laura [a past jazz instructor at LMU] traced it all the way back to, Africanism and Africanist roots of jazz music, jazz dance, and then brought it all the way forward to today." (D. Rago, personal communication, 2018).

Similar to modern, the dance department wants to educate a student in multiple facets of jazz dance, not just the commercial genre of it. While Jazz dance is style that is commonly seen in concerts, movies, and television shows, styles like modern or ballet could be performed as commercial work as well. Therefore there can be a confusion that a certain dance style is always catered for a certain field in the dance world.

### **Commonalities Between Fields**

One of the largest differences between concert and commercial work is how the style of dance is performed. For example in jazz dance there can be commercial jazz and also concert jazz. Deborah Brockhus, a sophomore Jazz professor at LMU, does a lot of concert jazz and her class centers around the approach of making a jazz piece and putting that on stage, so the dance is the main art form. (personal communication, 2018). Connecting to the classes I observed I found that every classes' professor at one point would talk about the personal performance aspect to the movement. For example in Roz's senior level 'Modern 5' class she said while the class was performing a phrase they had been working on, "now that you have the movement think about 'why' you are doing it...it is not about manufacturing your own motivation but having the

movement starting to talk to you and tell you what you need to do.” (observation, December 2018). There was a stress that the student must be able to find a meaning behind whatever movement, whether it was in a modern or a jazz phrase, in order to perform it to the best of their ability. In the senior level “Jazz 6” class it was constantly talked about not overthinking the movement and performing the story like you think it is supposed to be performed, but actually connecting to a personal story behind the movement so a student’s own personality and dance style can come through. (observation, November 2018). The fact that both styles of technique classes share this commonality connects that in a collegiate level training program, it is focused more about the technique and practice of dance. In other styles like hip hop, which is also known for being primarily seen in the commercial world, it can be performed in the concert setting as well. Rago explained that if when they have a hip hop class, it is not purely about practicing hip hop moves. It is normally a three hour class that studies not only the dance aspect, but the music, history and different styles within hip hop. It is focusing on the art of hip hop dance itself and giving a broad and deep education to the students with a multitude of styles. Professors want students to be able to grow and learn as an artist when moving, whatever the styles

In regards to a collegiate educated dancer, during the interview with Damon Rago he presented a article entitled “There IS no weakness in having a DANCE background. There is only strength.” (n.d). Which relates to the deeper aspects in training in dance in any field or industry. A few of the reasons the article states is that a dancer; has “critical thinking and problem solving skills,” is “calm in a crisis,” that they are “courageous, resourceful, a team player, versatile, and flexible.” (n.d). Rago explained the article did not specify what type of dancer, whether it be someone who primarily works in concert, commercial or somewhere in



between. In research Klockare, Gustafsson and Nordin-bates (2011) found that several collegiate level dance professors all came to the mutual agreement that instilling both dance techniques and psychological skills in the student would allow a successful career in the dance world post school. Which proves that professors create multiple ways to help students succeed in collegiate programs and to prepare them for the professional world of dance. The hope for the Loyola Marymount dance department is that the students graduate ready to go into the dance world in a multitude of facets and recognize the dedication it takes to do so. College educated dancers should “be ready to do both [commercial and concert work],” and should not “disdain one or the other because you prefer one or the other. You can prefer one and appreciate the other, or do both.” (D. Rago, personal communication, 2018). While there are many aspects that distinguish concert and commercial dance from one another, the appreciation and dedication of dance as a performance and art form is essential in order to do so.

### **Discussion**

In initial research of the concert and commercial dance fields, very few studies had been done surrounding this culture. Information generally surrounding the spectrum of the professional dance world was hard to find. Based on personal experience in a collegiate level dance program, I realized the communication surrounding a career in concert dance versus commercial dance differed. My research questions stemmed from the combination of the lack of research on the professional dance world and my interest of comparing the two popular fields within that world. The two research questions proposed were:

*Research Question 1:* Will there be a difference of instruction in classes geared toward styles that traditionally perform in the concert dance setting versus the commercial dance setting?

*Research Question 2:* How will professional level influences be talked about in each of the classrooms, that connect to the dancer's future career past graduation?

In observations and through the in depth interview with the chair of the Loyola Marymount Dance Department, I found that every classes instruction differs no matter what the style. The dance department wants aim is to train a diverse dancer ready for any sort of work either inside or outside of the dance world. In regards to instruction in class I found an emphasis on the integration of verbal and nonverbal techniques of teaching. Students were able to understand meaning simply off of body movements or a single non dance related term. All classes shared the theme of performance and putting one's personality and uniqueness behind any style of movement. However, I found that there is a larger emphasis on training geared toward a career in concert dance at the collegiate level. Combining the techniques offered and taught in both modern and lower level jazz classes, along with connections made for students inside and outside the classroom, there were more opportunities to succeed as a concert dancer than a commercial dancer. The major reason I came to this conclusion with the higher number of professional connections offered in the department that work in the concert dance world such as Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane company and BODYTRAFFIC. The department does not hold a connection in the commercial world which is equivalent, as celebrated, or as talked about, to these relationships with concert based companies. In all of the department's offered classes there is also only one class heavily focusing on a successful career in the commercial world. This class

is only offered to student during their senior year, compared to modern technique classes that the department requires students to take every semester.

These findings suggest that in this specific collegiate level dance program, while their goal and education curriculum is for their students succeed in a career in any facet of the dance world, they give their students more connections to have a career in concert dance over commercial dance. This can bridge to past studies made comparing concert and commercial dance, there college programs prioritize training geared to succeed in the concert world. There was no point in research that commercial dance was spoken of negatively or less than concert dance. However, it is apparent that there are more concert based technique training and professional relationships accessible for students at Loyola Marymount University. These conclusions are also not to criticize the department in the opportunities they give their students, only how the observations and findings can be interpreted. Other interpretations of these findings could be that there are not enough commercial world professionals wanting to teach at the collegiate level, therefore the resources for students to train further in regards to the commercial world is limited. Limitations to this study would be not enough time spent in the field taking observing in classes and not enough variety in classes observed. Another limitation is more in depth interviews with instructors of classes. These limitations could be reasons only certain results and aspects of the classes were observed.

### **Conclusion**

There is often a divide in the professional dance community of commercial and concert dancers. Both communities often view their end of the dance spectrum as superior instead of simply different than the other. The results from this suggests that Loyola Marymount University

Dance Department does favor the concert dance world because of the specified techniques training and networking opportunities in the concert students are exposed to. However the program overall still has the goal to prepare their graduates for a successful career in both the professional dance and non dance world. They believe any background in dance will create advantages in any career path because of the training one only receives as a dance student.

Looking at all research found, there are many directions for further study. One aspect could be looking at the student's perception of the program and how they think their education has made them a stronger dancer and given them a stronger chance to succeed in the professional world. Another aspect could be looking further at the nonverbal communication in a dance classroom and how the students are able to respond and understand a teacher's instruction without any verbal language. The dance community and culture is one that has a vast amount of research opportunities that surround it.

The concert and commercial dance worlds are still often talked about as separate dance worlds. It is important that this divide is lessened in the future to gain more of an overall unity and appreciation in the dance community. At the collegiate level it is important that they do not spark this divide mentality. Concert and commercial dance have distinct qualities to define them.

These fields of dance also have distinct training that is needed to thrive in both of them.

Collegiate level dance programs need to continue to foster the education of the whole dancer and not favor either in the of the dance world.

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